

## **BALTIMORE'S NEGROES ARE IN THE THRALL OF COCAINE**

### **Amazing And Dangerous Growth Of A Habit Unknown A Decade Ago.**

Right in the heart of Baltimore, under the very noses of her staid citizens, there is being conducted a traffic as bizarre in some of its features as any of the doings in the opium joints of San Francisco's Chinatown and as heavy with menace to the community as an unchecked cholera epidemic. It is the cocaine trade, and though it is but five years old, thousands of dollars are being made in it in the negro districts of Lord Baltimore's ancient city and in the Tenderloin and down town.

What is one to say to a business that has to be conducted in absolute secrecy, that has manufactured a dialect of its own known alike by Chinaman, negro and poor white, and that ruins the bodies and souls of its victims? When one adds to the indictment the fact that it is the direct cause of much of the current lawlessness among the colored people, and that it numbers its victims by thousands and is continually grasping for more, one can see, indeed, that it is a matter requiring the gravest consideration.

Up to 15 years ago cocaine was unknown in the local drug market. Up to five years ago its use as a stimulant was not generally recognized. Within the last five years its indulgence has become so general among certain elements of Baltimore's population that special measures have been taken by the Legislature against it, and the police at the present time are conducting a campaign upon its sale that presses relentlessly every advantage.

### **ITS SALE PROHIBITED.**

Cocaine is now distinguished as the only drug on the Maryland market whose sale is prohibited in any quantity and in any form except on the prescription of a reputable physician, and this prescription cannot be refilled nor, when filled, can a copy of it be given to the person presenting it. Morphine and opium can be sold in recognized preparations containing not more than a certain fixed amount of the drug, but the dispensation of cocaine in a proprietary medicine or in any other vehicle, no matter how minute it may be in quantity, is not allowed.

The first legislative action on the subject was taken in the Assembly of 1904, when a law was passed allowing the disposal of the drug, whose evils were then just beginning to be apparent, in a quantity not exceeding 1.128 of a grain to the dose of substance sold. In the session of 1906 a revision of this enactment was carried through, which resulted in the absolute prohibition of its sale in any quantity, in a pure state, or in a proprietary or other preparation, unless by express order of a physician—no repeat, no copy.

The penalty for violation was left in the amendment as it had been in the original bill, and has proved insufficient to check the evil. For the first offence of selling the drug illegally a fine of not less than \$25 and not more than \$50 is provided. For the second offense the fine is from \$50 to \$100, and for the third offense from \$100 to \$200, with an imprisonment of not more than 60 days and a forfeiture of the pharmacist's license, if the offender is a druggist.

According to the opinion of all of those persons interested in the suppression of the traffic this law is entirely inadequate. The very first offense should be punishable by imprisonment, say those who have had opportunity to observe. What good is it to fine a man the paltry sum of \$25 when he makes a profit on the sale of one pound of the goods of several hundred dollars? Among those who so express themselves may be mentioned Justice Grannan, of the Central Police Station; Justice Loden, of the Western Police Station; Captain Phumphry, of the Detective Bureau, and others who have had excellent opportunity to judge.

#### THE CURSE OF NEGROES.

The practice of cocaine using is confined at present almost exclusively to the colored population and to degraded white women. To narrow it down more, it may be said that the practice is confined to the criminal clement, but when this is asserted it practically means exactly what the first sentence did, for the effect of the drug is to convert a law-abiding person into an unscrupulous lawbreaker.

This faculty of destroying the moral sense is at once its most prominent characteristic and its greatest menace to the community. Cocaine arouses the worst instincts of the most depraved members of the population, and in fits of nervous irritation renders them absolutely reckless of personal punishment. It gives at one and the same time a lawbreaking instinct and a lack of fear of the power of the law—certainly a dangerous combination.

Justice Grannan, through whose court at the Central Police Station streams an unending procession of criminals, black and white, estimates that of the colored offenders presented before him 90 per cent. are addicted to the use of cocaine.

“Isn't 90 per cent, excessive?” he was asked.

“No,” he replied, “it is a large, but, according to my observation, a conservative estimate of the number of criminal colored people using the drug.”

“When did you first notice its use?”

“Cocaine first came to my attention about a year ago. I noticed the strange behavior of many of my colored prisoners. I investigated and several months ago in an interview for, a daily paper gave the result of my observations to the public. The police have now taken up the matter.”

“You may be quoted, then, as very earnestly advocating stringent action?”

“Decidedly. You can't place me too strongly against the use of this drug. I consider it the greatest force for lawlessness among the colored folk that I now have to fight. If you should see its awful work as I do you would better appreciate the strength of my opposition.”

#### JUSTICE LODEN'S VIEW.

From his vantage point in the tenderloin district, in the very shadow of houses of ill-repute, among the abandoned castaways of the city, Justice Loden, at the Western Police Station, has an unique opportunity for observing. His comments upon current affairs have before now attracted by their shrewd insight.

"How many negroes use cocaine?" he said. "Why, about 70 per cent of those before me. Seventy is quite moderate and the real number may be higher. To whom is its use confined? To the colored folk and to degraded white women. A woman that has thrown away everything else, in the world usually tries to make up for the lost pleasures of decency by the nervous ecstasies of 'coke,' and then we have her here."

"Do you think that the use of cocaine is responsible for the criminal conduct of those that use it?"

"Decidedly. As a matter of fact," speaking very earnestly, "I believe that the indulgence of cocaine by uneducated blacks is responsible for half of the assaults of these beasts upon white women. I blame a very large per centage of misdemeanor to the stimulating and deranging effects of this drug. No, I could not estimate just what proportion this should be."

Dr. Wilkens, who has for some time been physician in charge of the Baltimore City Jail, has conducted at various times for his own satisfaction a series of researches into the use of the drug among his patients in the lock-up. He says that its use is chiefly confined to women and that the proportion of female prisoners who use it is about 20 per cent. To offset the discrepancy between his estimate and that of the two magistrates consulted Dr. Wilkens suggests that perhaps the men' prisoners at the jails do not answer truthfully when questioned upon the subject. Also, he says, he only treats those persons habitually addicted to the use of it, and that he cannot tell how many more there are who occasionally use it but are not abject slaves to the habit. He finds its use confined to the colored portion of his charges.

Dr. Wilkens thinks that there should be more stringent regulation of its sale than there is. He does not make that statement because he considers the use of the drug dangerously widespread, or because he believes that it will become more common, but because of the pathological effects of the stimulant upon those indulging in it. His explanation of the effects of its indulgence fully explains his position and throws interesting light upon the statements made by the two police magistrates.

#### EFFECTS OF THE DRUG.

"Its first effect," he, said "is one of immense stimulation. The user feels, as is the most common definition, that he is in heaven. He is amiable to excess. He acts as if he wished everyone to be his friend and that he wished to treat them all. This exaltation of mood is common, however, to many drugs.

"In its second stages cocaine is unique. Instead of the usual depression of spirit as the stimulus of the drug wears off, there is an intense nervous irritability in the user. It is then that he is dangerous. His belligerence is at its extreme. His nerves are strung to their highest pitch and his craving for more of the drug is almost insupportable. Then he is liable to commit any crime, and it is, in my opinion, while in this state that most of the law-breaking acts of negroes are committed."

"What is the average dose?"

"That depends, of course, upon the length of time the person has been using it and the element of personal idiosyncrasy. About 9 to 12 grains, I should say, is the average dose. In the advanced stages of the habit 30 to 40 grains have been taken."

"How long does it take the drug to kill a man?"

"That question is impossible to answer satisfactorily and I should prefer to be allowed to keep my pence there. There are too many factors to be considered."

*En passant*, Justice Loden says that about one year suffices to consume the last of an able-bodied man's powers.

The physical results of indulgence in the habit are painful in the extreme. The cocaine fiend becomes emaciated so that his bones show through his skin.

"They look like shrunken skin and skeleton," says Justice Loden; "the drug actually seems to eat the flesh from their bodies."

The eyes are large and lustrous and have a peculiar sort of glassy, watery look. The pupils are much dilated, which is contrary to the effects of opium and morphia. The victim is nervous and unsure of himself. There seems a loss of consciousness of identity.

The craving for the drug is described as frightful. "Imagine a man without water for 30 hours and desiring to quench, his thirst." So Dr. Wilkens describes it. A person in this condition will go to any length to satisfy himself, and his threat to the community at large can be understood.

#### THE DEATH RATE.

The death rate among the negroes of Baltimore In 1891, just 15 years ago, when the drug was introduced here, was 31.48 to the thousand. In 1905 it was 32.05. This increase is hardly considerable, but it was thought that its explanation might have something to do with the cocaine traffic, so Dr. James Bosley, Health Commissioner, was interviewed upon the subject. His remarks to one desiring "damning evidence" were disappointing, but in other ways illuminating.

"Can the increase of the death rate be ascribed to the use of cocaine?"

"No, I would hardly say so. The death rate really is not considerably higher now than it was 15 years ago. if you want the real causes for negroes dying in Baltimore I'll tell you. They are consumption and disease resulting from lack of precautions of personal cleanliness and orderly living. These factors the Health Department cannot satisfactorily control."

Despite this other observers hold that cocaine is increasing the death rate among negroes. Modern science is fast lowering the death rate among whites—here and elsewhere—and the negroes are also benefiting by these advances. Tuberculosis, for example, is now known to be a curable disease. But despite this the negro death rate remains high. This is due to the fact, say some observers, that the negroes, by using cocaine and other drugs, overcome and destroy the good effects of modern medical treatment.

It is as well now to take up that other side of the traffic—its bizarre, picturesque side, the way the users illegally obtain the drug and the devious methods taken by those who are engaged in its sale to escape the clutches of the law. These equal in ingenuity the strength of the desire that gives birth to them and are so efficient that despite the utmost efforts of the police it cannot in frankness be said that a very appreciable progress has been made in stamping out the use of the drug. Possibly the growth of the habit has been checked, but it still holds sway among those already victims, and the person really wanting cocaine has no great difficulty in obtaining it.

#### THE SALE OF COCAINE.

These statements are made advisedly. A certain prominent police official who for obvious reasons does not want his name mentioned said when asked the other day: “Of course, it is all *sub rosa*, but the man who wants a charge of cocaine now has little more difficulty in satisfying himself than he had before we started our work.”

It must be remembered, however, that the police have only been working upon the matter for the last three weeks and that they are combating an enemy firmly established in that part of the population most inaccessible to the blue uniform. It is as well in considering this phase of the subject to go back to the beginning of things.

Cocaine is a product of a South American exportation—the coca leaf. In the form in which it is put upon the market it is a whitish, powdery-looking substance, having much the appearance of the hydrochinon used by photographers. It is in small needle-like crystals. In solution it is much used by dentists as a local anesthetic and lately it has been found that if a solution be injected into the spine all that part of the body below the point of treatment will be insensible to pain. Its benefits in surgery are thus immediately apparent.

In the powdered form almost exclusively it is used by those desiring its stimulative effects, though in certain proprietary medicines and soda-fountain drinks it can be obtained in solution. The common method of taking is as with snuff; a small quantity is held in the hollow of the hand and then drawn by the breath up into the nostrils, where it acts upon the sensitive membranes of the nose.

After long use it seems to have a corroding effect and many of those habituated to it have running sores at their nostrils or else part of the flesh is eaten away.

#### SOME HUGE PROFITS.

In the open market the cost of cocaine, wholesale, averages from \$4 to \$5 the ounce. Druggists who buy enough get a so-called jobbers’ discount of 40 per cent., with 2 per cent. off for cash in addition. For the last two months it has been quoted at \$3.50 per ounce, but this is an abnormally low figure. At the same time last year the price was nearly \$5. In the illicit market the drug is sold in doses containing about 10 grains at 25 cents the dose.

At this rate the entire ounce would be disposed of for about \$12, not counting waste, but even this large profit does not satisfy many of the human vultures who dispense the stuff. Adulterations often bring the final selling price of the stuff to about \$20. Subtract therefrom \$3.50, the purchase price, and the remainder is just \$16.50. A profit of about 471 per cent. is

worth working for, is it not? It does not seem strange either that most of the malefactors caught illegally selling the goods are able to pay their fines of \$25 or more.

Many of the speculators that take their chances with the police dispose of as much as an ounce a day. This is a conservative estimate, considering some of the tales told, by those who claim to know. The difference between \$20 and \$3.80 is \$16.50. Multiply this number by 7, "for the traffic stops neither for God nor man," and the result is a net earning of about \$115 a week. It is said that there is one young man in Northeast Baltimore who has made in one year's time the substantial sum of \$100,000 by peddling the stuff.

The police work, while its results are not so apparent now, has thrown an illuminating light upon the dark corners of this peculiar traffic. From the landmarks thus indicated it would be safe to say that the illicit sale of cocaine proceeds evenly along three lines—its disposal by an unscrupulous druggist, its sale by an adventurer or peddler, and its disposal in "fake" medicines—so-called foot cures, catarrh cures, headache cures and a legion of other patent medicines.

Some of these of the last division are handled by most reputable druggists, for there is nothing to label them as being other than what they claim to be. For this reason very innocent-looking-packages are sold in all good faith by druggists, who see only in them substantial and gratifying profit, and these may work incalculable mischief in one who by using them is involuntarily inveigled into forming the desire for stimulant. It is a safe rule to drop any patent medicine which you find you cannot do without.

#### IN PATENT MEDICINES.

A number of such preparations have been seized by the police in the last few weeks and referred to the Health Department for analysis of their contents. Out of 65 so treated it was found by test that 26 contained cocaine. The inspector who had this in charge at the Health Department was asked whether the amount was large or small in them.

"In all it was large," he said. "A great many contained nothing but pure cocaine. Some contained cocaine adulterated with chalk and other white foreign substances."

"Could the cocaine in any of these preparations serve the purpose for which the proprietary name of its package introduced it?"

"In none of them could there have been any medical virtue in the form in which it was and for the purpose for which it was recommended."

"Were all of the packages labeled?"

"A large proportion were in plain paper envelopes."

These plain paper packages, it has been explained, are sold by pharmacists, with little regard for statute, as headache powders or like compounds, to those of their customers who are acquainted with the real composition. In such a case an additional offense is committed, as it is against the law to dispose of any drug compound without the name of the dispensing druggist being plainly labeled upon it.

Some other very odd methods are followed by druggists handling cocaine in an unlawful manner. One of these is the old "trip-to-heaven" dodge, which now has almost passed. It can be explained thus:

Imagine a drug store, with its long line of bottles and a druggist idly behind the counter waiting for custom. Into this quiet establishment comes a seedy-looking individual who goes up to the counter after a furtive glance around.

"I want a trip to heaven," he says quickly.

This means that he wants one dose, or about 10 grains of cocaine.

"Do you want to come back?" asks the druggist.

"Yes," answers the man and this indicates that he wants two doses. If he had kept quiet after the druggist's question or had answered in the negative, he would have showed that he wanted only one dose, or "charge," as the police term it.

The druggist measures out the amount of drug desired and the individual deposits his 25 or 50 cents, as the case may be, and goes out.

#### HOW IT IS SOLD.

That was the old-style method. Rapid modern ways have pushed themselves even into this heavy atmosphere of concealment and intricate processes. At the present day the user of the drug does not do anything so clumsy as ask the druggist for anything. On the contrary, a sort of ticket-of-admission game is inaugurated. The aspirant for celestial emotions by the cocaine route is given a little, round, red or speckled red box, or one of some other distinctive color, very much the size of those that strychnine or calomel pills are sold in, and this serves as his card of identification. After one of these precious articles is once gotten the holder is reasonably sure of cocaine, no matter what his neighborhood or location.

The way this plan is worked is this: The holder of the box enters a drug store which he knows is all right for the purpose he has in mind, and without a word places his little box upon the counter.

"Twenty-five cents?" asks the druggist.

The patron nods if he wants one dose; says "fifty" if he wants two. The druggist then makes up the quantity desired, gives back the box with its coveted contents and receives his piece of silver.

Some pharmacists, overcareful of their skins, have complicated the simple method outlined above with a coupon scheme. To those customers whom they know they sell coupons for 20 cents, entitling the holder to two bars of soap or some other tomfoolery of the sort and require this with the inevitable little box as a means of identification. The holder of the coupon comes to the store, hands over his box, pays a coupon and a quarter, receives another coupon and a box filled with cocaine and departs in joy. The plan works well for the druggist, as it enables him to keep his customer 20 cents in debt to him, and thus he is so much ahead of the game.

Then, again, there is the druggist of the oldtime kind who doesn't believe in systems; who snorts and looks at you when you ask him for cocaine, and then, if he thinks you trustworthy, supplies the article asked for.

#### THE STREET PEDDLER.

One of the figures in the traffic that has given the police the greatest trouble is the private adventurer. Most often he is some depraved being who knows the tiniest ins and outs of the underworld. He has a wide acquaintance with its denizens, and it is almost impossible to trap him. Most frequently he is in cahoots with an unprincipled chemical company which supplies him the drug. Many old-time policemen are now cocaine peddlers.

The proprietary medicines can be easily and summarily dealt with. It simply means that those suspected shall have to be analyzed, and the difficulty of the problem is to put an official finger upon the suspects. This is not an insurmountable barrier, however, and has been found quite ascendable by methods of patience.

One crinkle in the question here, however, has to do with the poison law passed last spring, at the instigation of the Maryland State Board of Pharmacy. In a provision at the closer the enactment it is specified that no druggist shall be held responsible for the sale of the drugs—in the amounts mentioned beforehand in the bill—until he has been notified by the State board that their disposal is unlawful. It will thus be seen that a great power is placed in the hands of the State board, and a chance of equivocation in that of the druggist, who might delay proceedings against him by declaring that the article which he has disposed of had not been declared illegal by the board.

A test case of this was made in Justice Loden's court a couple of weeks ago, and it was decided that the pharmacist in question could be held for action for the sale of a certain proprietary medicine, despite the fact that it had not been declared unlawful by the State board. Justice Loden came to this decision after consultation with the State's Attorney and upon the grounds that since cocaine had not been individually specified in the concluding clause, and had been alone picked out for exemption from the list of other narcotics in not for sale except on the condition specifically mentioned, it was not influenced by the clause referring to those narcotic drugs generally nor was it under the State Board of Pharmacy.

This decision helps to clear the path of the police, as it gives them free hand to enforce the regulations of the law. Anything at present that simplifies their work is for the good. The final adjudication or straightening out of the matter noted is for the future and when necessity calls for a more exact definition.

#### WORK OF THE POLICE.

Now, just what are the police doing? They are not making a play to the galleries. Under Captain Pumphrey's command the detectives are quietly going to work collecting evidence and data, and sooner or later the law will put forth its hand decisively, once and for all. The police have "stools" and "decoys" out and are quietly going their way, making arrests to keep the peace and to gather evidence. They are doing nothing rashly, and every move is well thought out for the accomplishment of a complete extermination of the traffic in the deadening drug.



Will they be able to accomplish their purpose and completely stop the sale of cocaine in Baltimore? It is an open question. Most probably it will be obtainable in quantities and by the elect of criminals, despite every precaution, as whisky is now obtainable on Sunday, despite vigilant effort against its sale. It is certain that what can be done will be done by a police body that has always hitherto proved itself equal to any issue.

A strange phase of cocaine using was discovered last week in the Western Police district. It was nothing more or less than a gathering of habitués for the purpose of enjoying an evening with their master vice. There were six or more in the party, and one of them served as host. It is a strangely dramatic thought to picture them seated in some home of depravity with the cheap, glaring pictures around the walls, and at a given signal from the leader inhaling the prickling, maddening stuff. Then the fraternal, nervous exhilaration! Long live King Cocaine!